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plished by these officials was undone, but Tammany is a rebuked and chastened Tammany, at present, and a new use has been discovered for our voluntary organizations. They furnish in our boss-ridden cities some continuity of policy and effort, and establish a very useful sort of endless chain when to them return the efficient officials turned out by ungrateful municipalities. In office or out these men are, in this way, given an opportunity to use the experience they have gained for the public good. The retail method of these social service agencies that try to provide good leadership for volunteers must seem to such officials, in its slow unfolding, the only way of establishing a broader basis for administrative efficiency.

"Stick to the individual case," said a wise charity organization leader to one about to assume leadership. "Let nothing drive you away from it, for, rightly handled, there's the whole of social reform in it." The whole of social reform is in the retail method, when we follow faithfully wherever its careful working out may lead.

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PHILADELPHIA.

SUICIDE: SOME OF ITS CAUSES AND PREVENTIVES.

"It brought me to the verge of desperation, and well nigh made me put an end to my life. Art! Art alone deterred me. Ah! how could I quit the world before bringing forth all that I felt that it was my vocation to produce!" These grand words of Beethoven's, when recalling the agony he endured on finding that the harmonies amid which he had lived a charmed life were gradually becoming to him mere memories show how a suicidal tendency can be arrested by the saving power of an ideal of duty.

The increase of suicide is one of the most urgent problems of the day, among us English as well as elsewhere. Is it because we are losing the ideal of duty from want of religious

faith, from the struggle for existence, from self-indulgence, or from too great pressure of brain-power?

In all ages suicide has been a possible factor to be dealt with by many who have greatly suffered either physically or mentally. In pre-Christian times it did not need great agony to tempt a man to put an end to his life. It seemed a natural finality, though perhaps not the highest form of heroism. His friends, trying to dissuade Cato from killing himself, showed their belief that he displayed weakness of soul in preferring death to hardship. The conduct of Regulus would have been considered far nobler, as he preferred all the horrors of captivity among the Carthaginians to undergoing a voluntary death. Cicero compares a man and his life to a sentinel placed in his station, which he ought not to leave till relieved by his commander who placed him there—a simile that has been used in more modern days by Sir Philip Sydney¹ and Massinger.²

Virgil places in hell those—

“Who prodigally threw their souls away;
Fools, who repining at their wretched state
And loathing anxious life, suborned their fate.
With late repentance now they would retrieve
The bodies they forsook, and wish to live;
Their pains and poverty desire to bear
To view the light of heaven and breathe the vital air.
But Fate forbids; the Stygian floods oppose
And with nine circling streams, the captive souls enclose.”

Dante, following his most constant tutor, places suicides in the seventh circle, and speaks of the eternal divorce of soul and body.

“ for what a man
Takes from himself, it is not just he have.”

In the early Christian Church suicide was permitted to women to preserve chastity, but St. Augustine differed on this point

¹ “Arcadia.”

² “Virgin Martyr.”

from St. Jerome and St. Chrysostom, as he held a woman may be still chaste in spite of forced pollution. "Were it right to commit suicide in order to escape danger of future guilt," he says, "it were best for the Christian to kill himself immediately after baptism—but to maintain such a doctrine were sheer madness." Deliberate suicide nearly ceased for a time in most countries with the establishment of Christianity, and very generally continued in abeyance till the eighteenth century, the time of philosophic doubt—"the age of Light, Light without Love."³ When, however, we say that suicide became almost a negative quantity after the introduction of Christianity, it is melancholy to reflect that wholesale outbreaks of suicide were induced at various times by the cruelty which so-called Christians inflicted upon the Jews. What happened during the raging of the Black Death in the Rhenish towns in 1348-50, was by no means a solitary instance of this, when the unfortunate Jews were blindly accused of causing the pestilence by poisoning the wells, that common accusation formerly brought against any unpopular party at the time of any epidemic. To escape the fury roused by the spread of this delusion numbers burned themselves to death in their synagogues, and others massacred themselves in their houses. We know from "Ivanhoe" that the Norman barons thought no cruelty too long or severe to practice on the Jews, though Front de Boeuf's meditated tortures to extract money from Isaac of York were happily frustrated. York had many Jewish inhabitants, and has been the scene in olden days of many a sickening tragedy. On *one single occasion* five hundred Jews died by their own hands in that city! A great number of suicides *among Christians* took place in the eleventh century throughout the Western Church when Gregory VII decreed the celibacy of the clergy, and many of the discarded wives killed themselves some from grief and poverty, some very probably from the morbid belief that they had led evil lives.

Forms and ceremonies to inculcate horror at the act among the survivors have existed more or less in all civilized coun-

³ Keble.

tries. Burning the dead body, dragging the body out of the house through a hole in the door, (else it was believed the next person who stepped across the threshold would also commit suicide) or burying at cross-roads, were all forms in common use in most countries.

The last person who was subjected to burial at a cross-road, in England, was the parricide-suicide, Griffiths, who was interred June 1823, at the intersection of Grosvenor Place and the King's Road. Some authorities hold that a cross-road was selected for such a burial because it was a place where a cross, or crucifix sometimes stood, which made the spot only second in sanctity to the church-yard, and prayers could be offered up by wayfarers for mercy on the soul of the sinner. Another view, less charitable, is that the earth generally, and roads individually, rejected such a burden, and by burial at a cross-way, the roads divided the shame of it. The stake through the body was perhaps at first intended not as an insult, but to deter the ghost of the departed from walking on the earth again.

Religious, social and economic circumstances, education, hygienic conditions, all are factors in the increase and decrease of suicide. So far as regards education, a higher standard of general culture is always accompanied by a larger number of suicides, partly because a highly developed brain is more sensitive and feels more keenly. When considered from the point of view of the Christian religion in different European countries, the numbers are lowest where the Greek Church is the established form, and highest among Protestants. That the number in Paris is enormous as compared with those in all France points to the irreligious city in a partially religious country. Italy and Spain are examples of less suicide in countries where Roman Catholicism yet holds her own, but Italy has begun to think while Spain remains priest-trammeled, and therefore the Italian average is twice as high. Germany and Switzerland having very high numbers may indicate the mental unrest in countries where two religions clash. Protestantism a term here inclusive of Lutheran, Calvinist, and other forms—invariably has a high number as compared to Greek and Roman Catholic churches; this probably points to the dark and hope-

less Calvinistic principle of predestination, and also to the need of guidance in mental disquietude, the divine touch of human sympathy of which every soul at some time is in need, being met, more or less well, by the system of confession.

Statistics of special causes are however almost impossible to draw up; who can disentangle the cause and causer of the cause of grief, drink, or insanity? Mrs. Bosanquet in "The Strength of the People," places character as the strength of the nation, and it is the building up of character to which we must look as one of the barriers to suicide. The outcome of character, the doing of duty and forgetfulness of self, is shown to be a safeguard by the fact that in time of war suicide numbers are at a minimum, both among those in the field and those who stay at home. For then *everyone has interests outside himself*. During 1870-71 the time of the Franco-German War, the upward movement of suicide and madness was stopped in France. Of madness as well as suicide, because as is well known, the causes which tell on suicide are influences also on insanity. In England it has been the same, as regards those at home and in South Africa, but unhappily in France as well as Great Britain the immediate years following the war is usually a suicidal time owing to scarcity of work, much sickness, and, on first return, sometimes too much drink.

The general proportion of sex in most civilized countries of those who commit suicide is three men to one woman, but in England and Wales the average is two men to one woman, and in Denmark four to one. Child-suicides are more in number than would be commonly believed, and Dr. O'Dea has a heart-breaking list of them comprising, among several others, five who killed themselves from fear of punishment, one from cruel treatment, one from aversion to school. Like their elders, the majority of those who so die, would do so from some cause of misery; but in Harriet Martineau's autobiography we learn how she, as a child of seven years old, made serious preparations to cut her throat with a big carving knife, simply because she imagined Paradise full of flowers, "gay with yellow and lilac crocus," and wished to hasten thither! Naturally children do not realize what is involved in surrender of life; they have

no horror of death unless it has been instilled into them by unwise elders. The case of a child made miserable by ill-treatment at school, or home, is peculiarly sad, as the few round them usually compose their world, and the sensitiveness of youth sometimes drives them into a morbid belief of the whole, or a part of the accusations brought. The acute misery of a neglected or tormented boy or girl can never be the same in later life, as years bring a wider outlook and different standards. Youth is, no doubt, a time of hope, but not on the part of the young, only of their elders concerning them. Being sent to Coventry by his school-fellows, for a prolonged time, and through fear or hopelessness neither claiming nor receiving help from any in authority, has been known to make a boy hang himself, and in other cases bodily, added to mental, misery, has been the cause.

Suicide for love disappointments came into fashion with the "Sorrows of Werther." "We were speaking of suicide which you compare with great actions, when it is impossible to regard it as anything but a weakness. It is much easier to die than to bear a life of misery with fortitude." Unluckily these words of the wise Albert did not touch sentimental young people as much as did the actions of the love-lorn Werther. Goethe assures us that at one time he had himself a decided *penchant* for suicide, and that among his collection of weapons he set great value on an ornamental dagger, which he kept close to his bed-side and essayed occasionally to see if he could stick the point into his breast, a feat which he candidly acknowledged he never was able to perform!

Worry and unrest drive many a woman to desperation, where she could endure even worse troubles if enabled to meet them in quietness. About 1870, in the war time, the Jewish ladies in Paris petitioned their spiritual heads to keep the synagogue opened all the day long, alleging the practice of the Roman Catholic Churches in that particular, and declaring that many a person driven to despair might be saved by a time for solitude and prayer.

The suicides through purely physical sufferings occur in a greater number among the upper ranks than among the lower.

Perhaps the passive endurance of a life of material hardship has been a better training than a course of possibly unconscious and fairly innocent self-indulgence and softer living. Neuralgia, cancer, *angina pectoris*, (complaint indeed fulfilling its name!) and *illnesses allied with remorse* lead to many self-inflicted deaths. Consumption, however, seldom does, unless at the same time the patient suffers from some abdominal complaint, which creates a depression, such as more than discounts the hopeful nature of normal phthisis.

We hear of a man shooting himself, or of a woman taking an over-dose of chloral, in the agony of a fit of neuralgia. We may not judge, but in some cases it is an indication of lack of character and training; the suicide has probably had the pain before, though in a less degree, and if the idea of self-murder came to him or her, and was entertained, instead of being driven away as an entire impossibility, it would naturally come again some time with overwhelming force. People are not sufficiently trained in the dogma that self-murder is a breach of the sixth commandment. They think with Blount, the Deist, "I myself am King of Me, and may change one country for another." It is belief in the right to power of choice that makes self-will assert its claim in opposition to the lawful authority of Church and State. It is self-will and the want of dogmatic training that is at the bottom of many self-inflicted deaths. Purely moral principle, without the aid of religious conviction, may be a sufficient deterrent in a strong character, as for instance, in that of Napoleon Bonaparte. He said once, referring to English newspapers, "In one of them I am described as a coward, which I did not really expect; but it turned out, after all, that the writer did not accuse me of avoiding danger, or of flying from the enemy. I wanted courage, it seems, because I did not coolly take a dose of poison, or throw myself into the sea, or blow out my brains. The editor most certainly misunderstands me: I have, at least, too much courage for *that*. Suicide is a crime the most revolting to my feelings; nor does any reason suggest itself to my understanding by which it can be justified. It certainly originates in that species of fear, which we term *poltronnerie*. For what claim can that man

have to courage who trembles at the frowns of Fortune? True heroism consists in being superior to the ills of life, in what shape they may challenge him to the combat." Napoleon had a right to speak, for a weaker man, probably, in his place would have ended his life, which then consisted of overthrown ambitions, great physical sufferings, hopeless imprisonment, and was without the sustaining power of any specially religious faith.

A great preacher of the present day ⁴ says that "the terrible prevalence of suicide is more than a passing phenomenon; it means souls snapping here and there under God's correction."

That there *are* cases of self-killing which is not murder, few would deny: where the brain is affected by hereditary or other insanity, by physical or mental suffering, by starvation, anxiety and hopelessness. Loneliness is a great factor and the unmarried far outnumber the married in suicide statistics; where there are children, the widowers outnumber the widows; perhaps this shows a woman can struggle through almost any troubles as long as someone is dependent on her. Where there are no children, as a rule, suicides of widows are far more numerous than those of widowers.

It was loneliness and disappointed ambitions that caused the death of that "marvellous boy," Chatterton. He was only eighteen when in desolate London lodgings he took the fatal arsenic, and yet for many months he had already pondered over the idea of suicide, and the year before had written:

"Since we can die but once, what matters it
If rope or garter, poison, pistol, sword,
Slow wasting sickness or the sudden burst
Of valve arterial in the noble parts
Curtail the miseries of human life?
'Tho' varied in the cause, the effect's the same
All to one common dissolution tends."

Had but his sense of duty been as great as his genius, he would have lived for his mother's sake. He was an only son,

⁴ Canon Newbolt.

and born after his father's death. By Chatterton's act his mother endured many years of privation, dying at last of a lingering disease brought on by her troubles. Chatterton still had original manuscripts with him, some written under his own name (besides spurious copies of old books), which would have brought him money, but in a fit of anger against the world which neglected him, at the last moment he destroyed them. It was but a passing phase through which a sense of duty or a wise friend might have borne him safely, and his genius would have been too triumphant not to be speedily acknowledged.

The English gaolers of the type Charles Reade showed up in "Never too late to Mend" induced much suicide from condemning a prisoner to darkness in addition to solitude, which the nerves of few men could stand.⁵ That old novel which happily helped to work a change in prison life was brought to our mind some time since, when the papers mentioned the death in prime old age of the original "Evans," Charles Reade's humane gaoler. He was drawn as true to life as was poor Josephs, the boy of fifteen who hanged himself in his cell to save himself from further tortures.

The lesson to be drawn in some cases of suicide is the innate need of brain power being balanced by manual labor or active exercise. Too much reverie has at all times inspired a disgust for labor, and led to suicide, mostly through morbidity. We see the results of a preponderance of thought and speech over action, together with indecision of will in Hamlet, as evidenced especially in his argument "To be, or not to be." A strong, well-balanced character is armed against suicide. Clive was an example of how one who does not on principle drive away the idea of self-destruction, is, even if prevented from putting it into execution at one time, likely to be unable to resist it at a later period. As a boy of seventeen he had a writership given him by the old East India Company, and went to Madras. He was shy and haughty, homesick and lonely, wretchedly lodged, and miserably paid, so much so that in common with the other

⁵ We believe that the original of the heroic chaplain whom Charles Reade described was Rev. G. Hamilton, Archdeacon of Northumberland, who died Sept., 1905.

junior clerks he could hardly subsist without incurring debt. Twice while residing in the Writer's Buildings he attempted to destroy himself, and twice the pistol which he snapped at his own head failed to go off. This circumstance, it is said, affected him as a similar escape affected Wallenstein. After satisfying himself that the pistol was really well loaded he burst forth into an exclamation that surely he was reserved for something great. Public affairs, work, excitement of life, wealth and rank, all buoyed him up for many years, but in the end, his health again failing, and once more depressed by loneliness and the feeling that the world was against him, the old idea, which had *not been rooted out*, recurred to him: he again attempted his life, and this time he was not saved.

"Man errs not that he deems
His welfare his true aim
He errs because he dreams
The world does but exist that welfare to bestow."⁶

A morbid wish about self-destruction can sometimes be counteracted by treatment as for a bodily disease. Solitude and a sedentary life being the worst foes to mental health, remedies can be sought in active exercise, attention to diet, disuse of alcohol, and above all in confidence in a friend, or perhaps if unmarried, in marriage. Alcohol has always a special effect on the brain: it upsets the balance of the mind, and the pendulum swings with too great force between the present effect of forgetfulness or ease, and the after one of depression. During the three terrible months of the siege of Lucknow, there were several suicides; but nearly all happened quite early in the siege, when the soldiers still had dealt out to them drink as well as eatables. "With reduced diet and plain water the conduct of the men became more exemplary. The instances of cowardice and shirking were very few, those of fortitude, courage and brave endurance very many."⁷ And what heroic endurance it was; constant discomfort from heat, flies and dirt, chronic expectation of death, the common sight or news of persons mor-

⁶ Matthew Arnold.

⁷ "The siege of Lucknow." Lady Inglis.

tally wounded, or having to undergo amputations without chloroform, added to the agonizing dread and ignorance of what might be happening to those in Cawnpore and elsewhere. Surely it is wonderful that suicides were not many more. But at Lucknow it was again a case of the saving power of an ideal of duty.

One wonders if Church or State cannot lift up their voice more on this question of suicide. The worst possible lesson to teach any citizen is contempt for law. And yet what can we call it but contempt when, partly from sympathy for the family, and partly from the mistaken feeling that to lean on the side of mercy is kinder and quite harmless,—the coroner and jury at an inquest for *felo de se* almost invariably bring in a verdict of “unsound mind,” a verdict which leaves a man’s will in force, and allows the burial service to be read. But as the Duke of Wellington said, misplaced leniency is often the greatest cruelty. It has been suggested that it would be an extra deterrent if coroner’s juries, on sufficient evidence to show the sanity of the suicide, could incorporate in their verdict a clause denunciatory of self-murder. It would certainly greatly influence the majority of people as to the question of suicide being a crime, if the burial were always at night in solemn silence. The difficulty in England of divorced persons re-marrying in Church, has awakened some few people to regarding the marriage of a divorcé as a sin: cannot the Church show that she also recognizes the responsibility of sometimes withholding the funeral service?

C. F. YONGE.

LONDON.